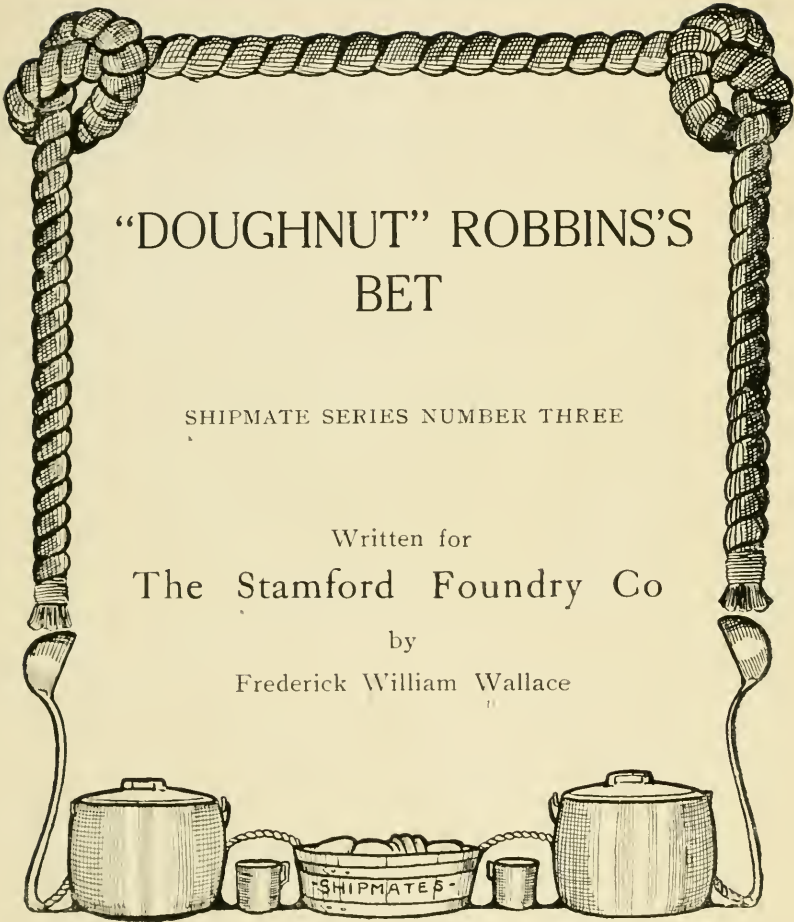


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# "DOUGHNUT" ROBBINS'S BET







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SHIPMATE SERIES NUMBER THREE

Written for  
The Stamford Foundry Co  
by  
Frederick William Wallace

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"We're the men who set on Georges,  
"On the Channel and Cape Shore,  
"From the Virgins down to Cashes,  
"And the Peak to Labrador.  
"We're the seiners and the shackers,  
"And the fishermen that go  
"Atrawlin' on the Eastern Banks,  
"From Grand to Banquereau."

—*The Song of the Fishermen.*



ERNE PHINNEY



WIFTLY the American fishing schooner *Columbia* was making her passage, homeward bound from the Eastern Banks, for Gloucester, for Jimmy Westhaver, the skipper, was driving her. Driving her in every

sense of the word; all four lowers spread to the northeaster howling over the starboard quarter and her bowsprit looking up for the twin lights when it wasn't looking for the bottom of the Gulf of Maine.

The gang, excepting the two on deck—one to the wheel, the other to look out—were enjoying a “lay-off” after weeks of hard fishing; and with two thousand quintals in the hold, the skipper did not believe in loafing on the passage while Gloucester market was waiting for their catch.

It was a wild night, cold, blowing hard, but clear. Just the kind of weather for making a grand shoot for home, and the men, as they lazed the evening away in their bunks, listened with keen appreciation to the muttering roar of the bow wave careering past them, with only the scant thickness of the planking between them and it.

It was a night for the bunk; for the comfort of bootless stockinged feet, slackened belts and a warm blanket; and with pipes aglow, the crowd lay jammed in their narrow bedplaces, while every timber, plank and stanchion in the big semi-

knockabout schooner creaked and groaned with the pressure of the canvas she was lugging along.

Erne Phinney, the cook—a jolly, ruddy faced man of about forty-five, and reputed to be the best cook out of Gloucester—found it precarious work hanging on to the weather lockers, so he slid gracefully down to leeward and squatted down alongside old Jerry Davis, who was trying to read "Lady Audley's Secret" by the light of a candle in a sticking-tommy placed perilously close to his head.

"Skipper's puttin' it to her, Jerry," remarked the cook as the vessel dived into a comber and the forecastle reverberated to its thunderous crash on the deck above. "I cal'late we oughter swing around Ten Pound Island by noon tomorrow. She's been dustin' at some clip ever since we swung off, and if he carries this breeze to the Cape, he'll make a record. What d'ye think, Jerry?"

Jerry laid down the novel and extinguished the candle before replying. Jerry and the cook were the two oracles of the forecastle—the former being the oldest fisherman aboard, and the latter the cook, and cook on a fisherman is second in importance only to the Presidency of the United States.

"Yep!" answered Jerry. "She's agoin' some—jest listen to that breeeze, fellers! He's got every chanst to make a passage in this craft, new, well-found, good gear; but, Lord save ye! he'll go some to beat the trip Tom Robbins made in the old *Esther Sullivan* years ago. D'ye remember that, cook?"

The cook smiled reminiscently. "Do I remember it? Cripes! I should rather think I did. Warn't I the first man to ship with Tom Robbins when he bought that old *Sullivan*, and didn't I stick with him in all the high line trips he made in her up to the time he left Gloucester and went out halibuttin' on the Pacific Coast? And I can remember that particular

trip all right, for 'twas me that had a hand in makin' him drive the *Sullivan* the way he did. Money and his stomach was the only two things Tom Robbins had any respect for, aye, dollars and grub, for pride he had none. I drove Robbins and Robbins drove the vessel—"

"How was that, Erne?" interrupted Davis. "Sure I always understood he was out to trim Jason Churchill what had the *Rose L. Pullen*. Them two were always at loggerheads, I heard."

Phinney reached for a match. "They was an' yet they wasn't, Jerry, for Robbins never cared enough about anybody to pick a quarrel. But it's a kinder roundabout yarn and one that 'ud take quite a bit of explainin' to make things clear—"

"You got plenty o' time, Erne," sung out a voice from the peak. "No fishin' tomorrow y' know, and there ain't no call for you to turn out early. I'd like to hear somethin' about that trip and Tom Robbins—'Doughnut' Robbins they useter call him, didn't they, Erne?"

"Yep!" replied the cook with a smile on his ruddy features. "And did ye ever hear how he got the name? No? Well, I cal'late I'd better give you the whole yarn. Cut me a fill from that plug of your'n, Jake, and after two draws and a spit, I'll fill away. So!"

With his rubicund face glowing through the halo of blue tobacco smoke like the sun in a Bank fog, the cook began.

"It was a good many years ago when I first met Tom Robbins. I was cookin' in the *President Harrison*—an ol' Provincetown toothpick—when this Robbins blew into Gloucester with a bunch of Newf'ndlanders in a bait vessel, and he shipped with our skipper in the *Harrison* for the winter fishin'.

"It was aboard the *Harrison* he got the name of 'Doughnut' Robbins. He'd never seen a doughnut afore, and when

I had placed a plate of them on the table, he starts in peelin' the skin off it jest as if it was a potato. By the Great Trawl Hook! didn't the gang laugh! But they couldn't jolly him nohow for he was as tough and as thick-skinned as a blue-dog, and mean—Lord save ye, but he was mean! Money jest naturally stuck to him, and ye couldn't pry him loose from a dollar with the boom tayckle and all hands to the fall.

"He'd mess around with old gear that was forever partin' on him and the best part of his time he was nosin' around lookin' for bargains. There was no fisherman in Gloucester that could fit out as cheap as Tom Robbins and up to his boardin' house he had a reg'lar junk shop of trawl tubs, odd shots of trawl, buoys, gurdys, and sichlike, which he peddled to the boys when he was ashore.

"Didn't he git a grab on every trawl kag in Gloucester once? Fittin' out time and most gangs riggin' new gear and not a trawl buoy to be had except from Tom Robbins, and him chargin' three times what they wuz worth! Oh, but he was a financeer was Tom, and it warn't long afore the boys quit callin' him 'Doughnut'. Ef ye did, he'd pull out a roll of bills as thick round as a fishin' hawser and tell ye them was the peelin's. 'Yes!' he would say. 'I useter peel my doughnuts, and them's the peelin's!'"

The cook paused in his narrative and glanced over the interested faces peering over the bunk rising boards.

"Aye," he continued. "It didn't take Robbins long to make enough money to buy a vessel. He wouldn't go shares with nobody but jest bought the old *Esther Sullivan* for about three thousand dollars and took her out salt fishin' without givin' her a lick of paint or an overhaul, and her lyin' to the wharf for a year afore he bought her.



The cook paused in his narrative and glanced over the interested faces peering over the bunk rising boards.

that, I was supposed to git cups, plates, knives, forks, spunes, kittles, pots, lamps, bakin' board and enough fittin's to purvide for eighteen men.

"Five dollars, by Heck! That was too strong for me, so I giv him his money back and told him I wouldn't ship with a skipper that wouldn't purvide the necessities of life.

"What did he do? Why, jest pockets the money, and after tellin' me 'twill be all right, he comes aboard later with a bunch of junk he'd got for two dollars from the old *E. S. Birtwell* what was laid up.

" 'I've jest saved three dollars by doin' my own buyin', ' he says, and he was as pleased over it as a T Wharf shark what has sold a pair of imitation rubber boots to a fisherman. Lord, but he was mean!

"Well, out to sea we swings, and a more sorrowful set of rags on a vessel never disgraced the port of Gloucester. Her mains'l was like a Noo Bedford whaleman's shirt—a patch on a patch and a patch overall—while 'twas only a young and active man that could go aloft for she hadn't a whole ratlin left on either fore or main riggin'.

"But we got fish! Yes, fellers; as soon as we made the grounds, 'Doughnut' had the dories over and never let up until the bait was done and the salt wetted. Then around Eastern P'int we comes pokin' one blowy day and surprised the natives—a dirty, disreputable old schooner, but with an everlastin'ly good trip below decks.

"After that, we made two crackin' good trips—another salt fishin' and a winter haddickin'—what made some of the old timers open their eyes when Robbins hailed his fare; and even to the low dory, our fellers drawed high-line shares out of her stocks.

"This helped to make Robbins's name, but ye sh'd have seen the vessel. Boys! oh, boys! but she looked a sight to everyone but the skipper. He didn't care two straws for the vessel's appearance as long as he could catch fish, and he was the boy to catch 'em.

"We started fittin' out then for a spring halibuttin' trip to the east'ard—that is to say the gang were doin' the fittin' out, not Robbins. All as he did in that line was to give the *Sullivan's* hull a lick of coal dust and kerosene, send up his topmasts, and reeve off a new mainsheet.

"'Ah!' says he after reevin' off that sheet, 'she's all ready for the summer now. The next thing is to git to sea and pay for her overhaul.'

"Then some of the boys went up and asked him ef he intended to git new dories. 'New dories!' he yells. 'An' what in the ruddy Hades is the matter with the ones ye've got?'

"'Matter?' answers Jesse Publicover—him that's skipper of the *Hood* now. 'Jes listen to him boys! Why the blame' bottoms in them are worn thin as a shingle. Sure, I kin stick my fork clean through ivery time I'm pitchin' fish, and I'm allus afraid some ruddy halibut'll flap extra hard with his tail and send us all into the drink—they're so thin. 'Sides that, they're leaky and need bailin' all the time to keep 'em afloat, and the gunnels are so shaky that I'm afraid to pull hard for fear I should yank 'em clean off, an' yank 'em off we will when we start gurdyin' halibut. 'Tis fine they'd look as flower beds or lobster cars, but as dories for fishin' in, they ain't w'uth an ornery damn!'

"Did they git 'em? Not on your life! 'Tis easy ye'll have to go in 'em,' says Robbins. 'You fellers abuse 'em. They ain't iron-clads. Go easy in 'em, and I'll maybe git a new set in the fall.'

"That's all the satisfaction they got from him, and then I broaches the question of a new stove.

" 'I can't cook decently on that bunch of junk below there,' says I, 'and a new stove I must have. Let me go up to the store and order a SHIPMATE afore we swing out. Let's git a stove ef we git nawthin' else.'

"It would have brung tears to your eyes to have h'ard the way I begged him to let me git what I wanted, but it was no use.

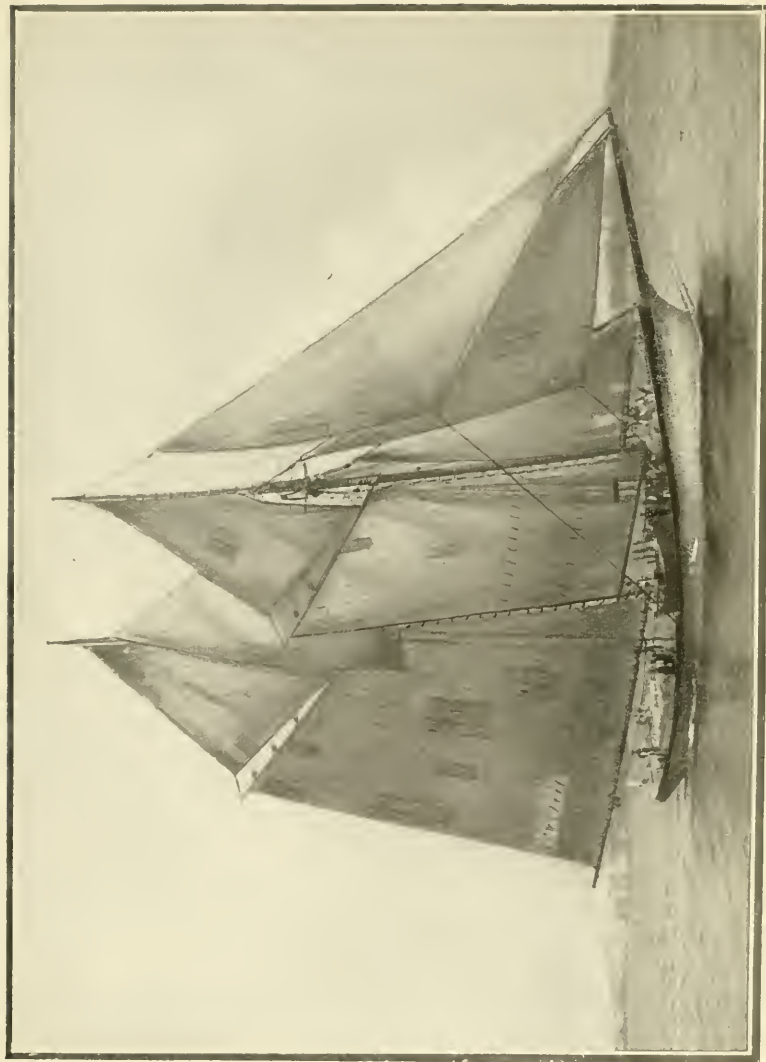
" 'Erne,' says he, 'I ain't got no fault to find with your cookin'. When I don't like your grub, I'll maybe see about gittin' a new stove then. Ye have my permission to buy a little wire ef it wants fixin'.' And with that he walks away.

"It was jest about this time that Jason Churchill come out with the knockabout *Rose L. Pullen*. Jason come from the same place as Tom Robbins and the two of 'em were always at loggerheads with each other, tho' I don't know why. Maybe it was jest because they came from the same village, but anyways Robbins had no use for Churchill and Churchill had less for Robbins.

"The *Pullen* was a mighty fine big craft—a new style knockabout; no bowsprit, and a whale of a fo'c'sle—'sides what she was well rigged and geared compared with our old toothpick.

"While we were fittin' out she lay acrost the dock from us gittin' ready for a trip same as us, and Churchill use to git our skipper mad by walkin' his vessel's quarter and passin' remarks about the *Sullivan* to his gang.

" 'D'ye see that old wrack acrost the dock?' he'd sing out, loud enough for all Gloucester to hear. 'They say her skipper's agoin' to hire her out as a yacht to Boston folks. Ain't she an object? Looks like Tom Robbins—dirty as a pig on



THE ESTHER SULLIVAN



a mud flat—and he's been so busy peelin' doughnuts and things that he's takin' to scrapin' the paint off his old hooker's topsides to number his high-flyers with.

" 'Some craft, boys! Leaks like a basket, I'm told, and sails like a house—all drift and leeway, 'sides takin' an hour to come about. Ain't she a curiosity?'

"And so on and so forth, while Robbins 'ud be stampin' and grindin' his teeth. Churchill seemed to be the only man that could raise Tom's dander; and after a broadside the skipper 'ud stamp down into the cabin and curse Jason from Southwest Harbor to Fulton Market.

" 'I'll git him some day,' he would say, 'an when I do, I'll skin him to the ballast. I'll fetch him up all standin' some of these fine days, and by Godfrey! I'll take pleasure in peelin' the hide off'n him!'

"Well, our crowd got their skates of halibut gear ganjed and hooks seized on, and with our ice and bait aboard we swung out for the Cape Sable and La Have grounds followin' the *Rose L. Pullen* which left two days afore us. We had a dead beat up to the Gully and on the run off to the grounds our fellers got plenty of chanst to think over things in general and soon they scared up a kinder grouch on the skipper 'count of his stinginess.

"They chewed the rag over the old dories; they passes remarks on the sails and the gear, and when the gang turned out to jig up they'd lay all their weight on the halliard and when it parted they'd curse and rip around like fishermen do when there ain't no fishin'. Skipper doesn't care a hoot but lets them talk all they had a mind to, and if they bust the gear, they'd have to repair it, not him.

" 'I'll worry the old tightwad,' says Publicover. Her gear is jest about on the last tack, and some fine day when it's my

trick I'll jibe her over and fetch everythin' down by the run. See ef I don't!

"All this time I was havin' a holy session with that old scrap pile of a stove, for it took most of my time tinkerin' and coaxin' it to cook anythin', but while I was messin' around with it, I has an idee. I never said nawthin' to nobody about it, for idees are best worked out by the man what has them, and as mine spelt trouble for all hands as well as the skipper, I jest worries around until we made our first berth some twenty-five miles to the south'ard of Cape Sable.

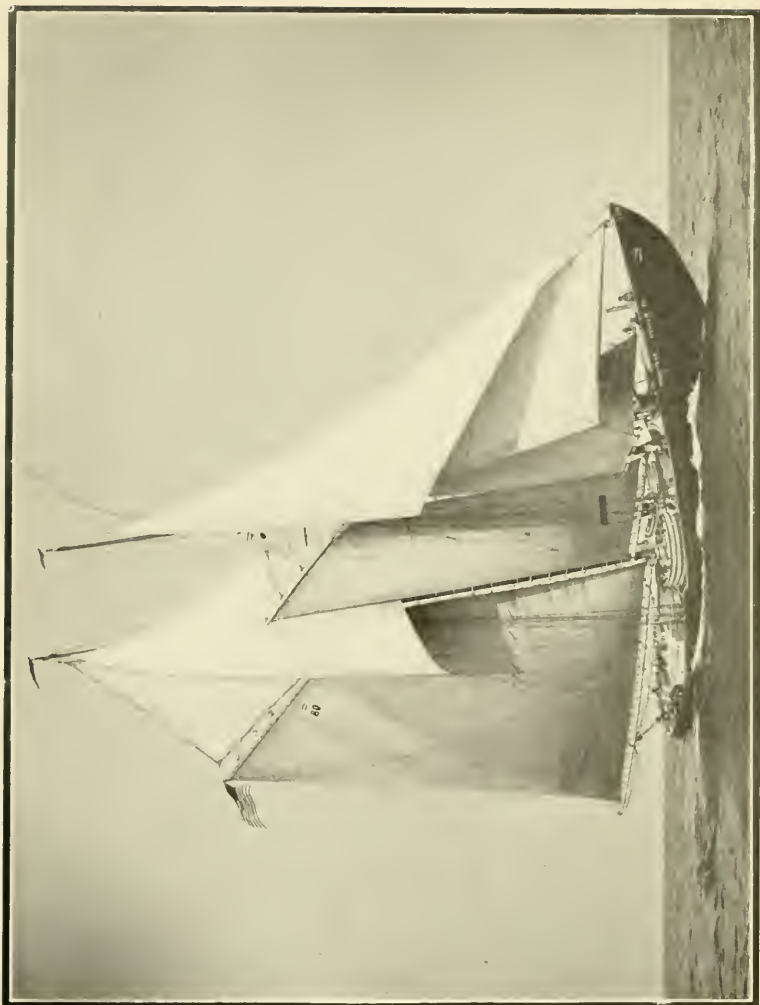
"Soon as he made the ground, Robbins had the gang bait-in' up and the set made, and I got busy on my own hook, so when the crowd comes aboard for dinner after gurdyin' away on halibut gear suarled up on hard bottom all mornin' I had a dinner ready what wasn't fit for a dog to eat. I had some clam chowder which I managed to scorch nicely; then some b'iled salt beef jest warm and no more and 'bout as tough as a lignum vitae bulls-eye, and with a pot full of smoky, burnt tapioca, some soggy ginger cake and sour bread, I jest had that crowd rippin' and tearin' around somethin' sinful—skipper and all.

" 'What's the trouble, cook?' says he to me. 'Ain't you feelin' well?'

" 'I'm well enough,' says I.

" 'Well,' he sputters, for he was kinder 'fraid to complain. 'How did ye come to dish up sich a mess of burnt, goozy grub as this?'

" 'Tis me that'll ask you a question,' says I, 'for how d'ye expect me to cook anythin' on a heap of ballast iron held together with hay wire. 'Tis on its last legs, and was, years ago, an' didn't I ask you for a new one in Gloucester afore we left?'



THE ROSE L. PULLEN



"To this he gives no answer—jest looks at the stove and climbs up on deck. Then I turns round and gives the gang a wink. 'If any of youse is hungry,' I says, 'ye'll find a mug-up in the flour cupboard; not the shack locker, y'understand, but the store cupboard. The shack locker grub is for the skipper's mug-ups, and don't none of youse put him hep to my game or by the Great Trawl Hook! I'll put poison in your soup ef you do!'

"Of course when the gang got wise they started a little game on their own end of the line and they cert'nly played hell with Tom Robbins that afternoon. They kept him chasin' after them all over the grounds—the gear was forever partin' they said—and Robbins was beginnin' to think there was an everlastin'ly hard tide runnin' below the surface as he towed dory after dory up to their buoys.

"It was jest comin' on dark when he started in pickin' the dories up, and as we carried no spare hand, I had to be on deck to catch the dory painters, and believe me, I never had so much fun in all my life. There was jest a nice little westerly breeze ablowin' with a little jobble of sea and that crowd made hay of the skipper's dories.

"Tom Killam and George Hood in number one dory came alongside first; hove out their skates of gear, the buoys and the gurdy, and then the two of them gives an extry hard stamp of their feet on the bottom boards and she filled to the gunnels. The two dorymates jumped for the rail as she went under and a fine doryload of prime halibut goes slippin' into the sea again while the skipper was ahowlin' for to git her on the tackles as he jabbed at the sinkin' halibut with the long gaff.

"Somehow or other"—and the cooked smiled meaningly—"that dory painter parted and while the old man was rippin'

out North Shore prayers on us, there come a yell from for'ard --the vessel was jest fillin' away again with no one to the wheel-- and the first thing we seed was Jesse Publicover and his dorymate ascramblin' over the bows. Jesse comes tearin' aft to the skipper lookin' as savage as a bear. 'This is a nice thing!' he roars at Robbins. 'Go and run me down! Try and drownd me and Jack there, and us bin ayellin' at ye and dodgin' ye all over the blasted Bank as ye come slammin' at us hell-to-split and drive us under. Run our dory inter chopsticks with yer carelessness and lose all our gear and fittings 'sides as fine a haul of halibut as ever comed off this bottom!'

"Sure enough, we looks over the stern and there was Jesse's broken dory and his trawl buoys floating away, and for five minutes Tom Robbins had to listen to the rough side of Jesse's tongue without bein' able to say a word.

"Well, fellers, we sure badgered Tom Robbins that night. The boys 'ud come rearin' down agin the schooner's hull and then when half their fish had bin pitched out they'd kick out the plug and jump for the rail as the dory started to fill. 'Look how bad she's leakin', skipper,' they'd say, and Robbins, unable to see the drawed plug under the fish would yell for the dory to be hoisted aboard before it sunk.

"Two dories with gunnels stove, one sunk and one run down was the bill for that night, and it was all done apurpose, even to Jesse Publicover runnin' under her bows to git his dory smashed up.

"Then I had a supper ready that 'ud make a shark sniff. A half baked halibut swimmin' in the rancidest butter I could git--lead line arming it was; half boiled potatoes, smoky tea and doughy biscuits jest 'bout got Robbins goin' and the way the gang carried on was a terror.

“We cal’lated the skipper would git kinder fed up with things and be for swingin’ her off for Gloucester, but he warn’t the kind to give up in a hurry. ‘There’s four dories left,’ says he, ‘and this craft will make a trip even with four dories. Youse fellers kin go four to a dory—two kin bait up and over-haul gear aboard, and other two kin make the set.’

“And this was how he kept ’em agoin’ all next day, and as it was a’most a flat ca’m, there was no chanst for smashin’ dories, so we gits quite a little deck of fish, much to the annoyance of the gang.

“’Twas me that got in the fine work, fellers, even tho’ I had to work double tides to do it. For every dish I sp’iled, I had to make a good one to put in the flour cupboard for the boys, and I want to tell ye, the skipper got his fill of half-cooked and burnt vittles them days and it was makin’ him sick. And the boys didn’t spare his feelin’s any by the way they talked about the way the food was served.

“‘Infernal shame,’ they says, ‘that we have to eat sich truck. Erne Phinney is a good cook—as good as any out of Gloucester—but what kin he do with sich a hunk of junk as he’s got for a stove. And ’tis all the skipper’s fault. He won’t git anythin’ in the way of new gear. Look at the dories we got! Look at the outrageous fittin’s on this hooker! Sails ain’t w’uth a damn and liable to blow away in anythin’ of a breeze; ropes all ready to part as soon as ye lay any weight on them—’

“‘Yes,’ says Jesse Publicover. ‘There’s Jason Churchill down to loo’ard there alaulhin’ at us. I was atalkin’ to one of his crowd when we was out in the dories today and he said that Jason was agoin’ to send the derelict destroyer out here to remove the *Issther Sullivan* as bein’ a menace to navigation. Said this here peddler reminded him of the ‘Flyin’ Dutchman’

—she was so old lookin' and it was a wonder to him how she ever managed to fetch Gloucester with sich old rags for sails.

"Robbins was standin' by the fo'c'sle scuttle when Jesse was atalkin' and he must have h'ard every word of what he said, for when he comes down the ladder for supper he asks Jesse when the *Pullen* was swingin' off.

" 'Tomorrer, I cal'late,' answers Jesse. 'One of her crowd told me she'd used up all her ice and bait.'

"The skipper said nawthin' but deals himself out a plateful of boiled rice, tastes it, and shoves it away with a curse while the gang nearly exploded laughin', for I excelled myself on that rice—boilin' it in salt water and burnin' it nicely. Then he grabs a doughnut, feels it, and lays it down; then a hunk of bread, sniffs at it, and heaves it back—it was good and doughy and sour, believe me—and he gits up from the table and stamps aft while the boys near busts laughin' at him. It was too funny for anythin' to see the look he shot at poor, innercent me, allus busy tinkerin' with the stove when he was 'round.

"Drawin' away on his jumbo he sneaks down to loo'ard where the *Rose L. Pullen* was dressin' down her catch. There was a good breeze ablowin' and the barometer was agoin' down for more, as under our four lowers we swings around the *Pullen's* stern.

" 'Hullo!' yells Churchill as we swings by him. 'Still afloat with that old wrack? Come up, fellers, and see Noah's Ark, Ararat for orders, and with old Noah to the wheel there!'

"His gang knocks off to have a laugh at us, and we could see Robbin's face as black as a thunder cloud. He throws the vessel up for a minute and sings out, 'She's an old wrack, is she? Then what odds will ye give me on a hook from here to Eastern P'int?'



“—they’d kick out the plug and jump for the rail as the dory started to fill.”



"Go 'way,' shouts Churchill. 'Tis like takin' candy from a kid, but I'll take a hundred dollars off'n you with pleasure.'

"'A hundred dollars be damned!' says Robbins. 'What's a hundred dollars to me! Suppose you make it five hundred, eh? Will you put up five hundred on yer vessel? I got that much anyhow to put up on this old wrack as ye call it—'

"'Five hundred!' yells Jason. 'D'ye mean to say ye'll risk five hundred dollars with me on a race in that old tub?'

"'That's what I said,' answers Tom. 'Maybe ye'd be for raisin' it a little? Say a thousand? How about it?'

"'This was too much for Churchill, who thought Robbins was gone crazy, and he wasn't the only one that thought so, for sure the crowd of us were of the same notion.

"'No,' says Jason. 'I cal'late five hundred'll satisfy me. I don't want to libel that old hooker for payment. When d'ye swing off?'

"'Now,' replies Robbins 'I'm all ready.'

"'Then go to it!' yells Churchill, and soon he was hollerin' to his gang to git the light sails set—"

"Why, Tom Robbins must ha' had a lot of confidence in his old vessel t' take on a bet like that," interrupted a man on the lee locker. "Was she much of a sailer, Erne?"

"Yes," answered the cook. "She could sail all right tho' Tom Robbins hadn't done much crackin' on in her afore. He was so careful of the gear in our run-offs that he wouldn't drive her, and comin' home we were gen'ly so deep that she could only make ordinar' sailin' of it, but she had a good sharp hull on her and purty fine lines—jest as good as the *Pullen* tho' she was an older vessel."

Here the cook paused to refill his pipe and the eager faces peering over the bunk boards waited impatiently for the continuation of the narrative.

"Well, as I was asayin', the *Pullen* swings off and Robbins calls the gang aft. 'Ye heard me, I callate,' says he. 'Now git your balloon and stays'l set. Give her the main-tops'l. Jig up everythin', and take a pull on that mainsheet here! I'm agoin' to trim that big mouthed ballast fish afore he's a year older. Swing her off for Gloucester! West by no'th and nawthin' to!' And round goes the old *Sullivan* buckin' in to her long two hundred and twenty-five mile stretch for Eastern P'int with the wind out of the no'th'ard and breezin' up.

"We rouses out the stays'l and balloon out of the box, bends them on and sends them up, and after sheetin' down, away goes our old hooker poundin' hot-foot after the *Pullen* half a mile ahead of us and hoofin' it for all he was worth. Then it comes on thick and we lose him in the blackness of it, for it got so dark we couldn't see him. He couldn't see our sidelights 'cause the skipper wouldn't let me put them up. 'I ain't agoin' to show that joker where I am,' says he. 'Jest keep 'em handy for showin' in case ye sights another vessel, and keep a double look-out for'ard!'

"By the Lord Harry, boys, that was a night and no mistake. He had no need to tell us to keep a good look-out for'ard for nearly every mother's son of us kept the deck, too scared to stay below for fear she'd run herself under or be run into by another vessel, and the way that old toothpick stomped, r'ared, and ripped along, was a fright. The breeze stiffened into a proper buster and had the old *Sullivan* draggin' her lee rail through it at a twelve knot gait. Robbins staggers along the weather quarter, squintin' into the binnacle and up at the sails and sniffin' at the breeze. Lord Harry! I fancy I kin see him yet—pacin' the deck with his hands in his pockets jinglin' some coppers; his shoulders hunched up, and the red

nose and whiskers of him stickin' out from under the fore-thatch of a winter trawler's hat like the tusks of a walrus I once seed up the Labrador!

"By midnight she was luggin' more than she could carry and the wind was comin' away squally, and when she got the puffs she jest laid down to them until the main hatch went half under and everythin' fetched to loo'ard that wasn't rivited to the hull.

"Didn't the boys have a session? He had Publicover to the wheel for two hours and pretty nigh scared him stiff. 'Don't you dare let her come up in them puffs,' the skipper told him. 'Tis the puffs what helps her along.'

"'But she ain't got no stiffness,' says Jesse. 'There's nawthin' in her hold—'

"'An empty hold is good racin' trim!' answers Robbins, 'both for vessels and men. Sure'n I haven't had a square meal sence we made the grounds and when I go in trainin' like that I'm a fair devil for carryin' on. Keep her off now—she'll stand it!' And when he says this, she rolls down until the lightboard in the lee riggin' goes under and all the gear is washed out of the top dory on the lee nest.

"That little roll-down took the maintops'l, for in a second after she split, and there was nawthin' but the boltropes left to clew up. From then until daylight, the gang had their work cut out for them patchin' up the gear as it parted. Everythin' bust but that new mainsheet. First goes the lee balloon sheet, and down the sail has to come until a new one is bent on. Then the stays'l catches a puff and snaps the pin what the sheet is belayed to, and when Robbins brings her to the wind, there was the gang up in the lee riggin' clawin' away at that sheet awhippin' around in the darkness and threatenin' to flick someone over the side.

"The foresheet was the next to git adrift, and when it went the boom jest slintered the lee nest of dories inter kindlin', and with the bangin' and flappin' of the fores'l, the peak halliard parts and there was hell to pay for a good quarter of an hour until they got it secured and the sheet rove off, end for end, afresh.

"Long about three in the mornin', the skipper comes below for a mug-up, and I own I felt kinder sorry for him when I sees him diggin' inter a mess of cold, burnt beans and a hunk of sour dough. I had some coffee too, made especially for him, and stewed till ye could ha' used it for ink. He finished a plateful of beans and a cup of coffee, and then looks over at me with the mug of him redder'n a b'iled lobster. 'By God, cook,' says he. 'The sooner we git to Gloucester, the better for all hands. I've eaten better truck with a North Shore live-yere in starvation time—'

" "'Tis the stove, skipper,' I says gently. 'Didn't I ask ye for a decent stove afore we left?'

" 'Hell!' he says, and then stamps on deck.

"It was jest about breakin' daylight when she whips the two topmasts right out of her—snapped off jest above the mastheads in a strong puff, and down comes the balloon and stays'l in among the gear. The skipper had the wheel himself then, and it was him what jumped the broomsticks out of her, and he laughs, yes, laughs like a schoolboy, when he saw them go, and there was the gang peekin' at him as if they thought he was crazy. 'Clear away that raffle!' he sings out. 'She's in winter rig now and will stand anythin'. Save the gear and sails, fellers, they're all right!'

" 'Save them and be gol darned!' says Publicover, as he crawled out on the bowsprit to rescue the balloon. 'Gimme a knife!' he says, and he cuts it adrift.

"The skipper must ha' seen him from aft, for he gives the wheel a wrench to starboard and drives her nose into it and Jesse and the crowd on the bowsprit went under.

"Holy Mackeral! Ye should ha' h'ard Jesse swearin' when he came aft! 'Did ye save my balloon?' asks the skipper. 'Naw,' answers Jesse, all drippin' wet. 'The blame thing was blown out of our hands afore we had a chanst.'

"Robbins jest gives a grunt at this, and asks Jesse to relieve the wheel. 'Take it, Jesse, and keep her full an' I bye. She's alayin' her course and don't you dare let her come up any!'

"'But I'm all soakin' wet,' says Jesse.

"'That's nawthin', boy,' says the skipper. 'You ain't the only one that'll be wet afore this day's over. A little spell to the wheel'll dry ye out, man.' And poor Publicover had to take a mighty long and tough trick, for the others were too scared to take the wheel in sich a breeze and sea.

"When it come full daylight there was no sign of the *Pullen*, and not another craft did we see but a big lump of a Dago salt bark standin' in for Gloucester and shortened down to his lower tops'ls. It was blowin' stiff then, and the old *Sulhvan* was jest scoopin' seas aboard and jumpin' about so much that ye could a'most feel her keel twistin' every time she bucked a grayback.

"The skipper was right about gettin' the gang wet, for he drenched them all afore noon—she was jest like a half-tide rock—and when we made to the south'ard of Cashes, her rotten old mains'l started rippin', an' the first thing we knowed, it had gone into tatters. We roused the ridin' sail out of the kid and bent it on while she was holding her course, and after gittin' things squared up, she ships a sea what drives the chain box up agin the weather dories. Them dories jest naturally

leaves the gripes and chocks and comes aft—jest missin' the skipper at the wheel as they sweeps over the quarter—and him a'most up to his neck in water awatchin' them go, and the gang hangin' to the mainboom.

" 'We'll have to git new dories now,' he says to the crowd, but they were too scared to laugh, and let me tell you it took a whale of a lot to scare that crowd.

"I never done no cookin' that day. Nawthin' could be done with the vessel r'arin', poundin', and flingin' herself about, and a wild, cold, miserable day the boys put in. The cabin was swillin' with water—the skylight was smashed in—and the fo'c'sle leaked like a basket so that every time she shipped a sea it 'ud come streamin' down the scuttle, the ventilator, and down the foremast and pawlpost. Yes! she was a miserable tub when she was bein' driven!

"Long about seven in the mornin' we took a sound and made the seventy-five fathoms to the south'ard of Fipennies—she was rippin' along like a liner then under ridin' sail, fore-sail and jumbo with the crowd of us tryin' to keep a fire goin' in the cabin stove—and at half past eleven we had Cape Ann abeam. That was some clip for a vessel under that canvas—fifty-seven miles in four and a half hours! But Lord, boys, it was blowin' strong enough to blow the teeth down your throat ef you spat to wind'ard that day.

"Twenty minutes or so later we hauled around Eastern P'int with the crowd of us lookin' to see if the *Pullen* had managed to git in before us.

" 'She ain't there, fellers,' says Robbins quite cool. 'Don't worry. That five hundred is mine!'

"The cock-sureness of him fair took the gang square amidships, and 'twasn't until a tug came down the harbor that we really believed we'd won.

"'Is the *Rose L. Pullen* in yet?' we sung out to the tug-boat skipper.

"'Naw,' says he. 'You're the only vessel in this day. See anythin' of an Eytalian bark outside?'

"'Never mind your bark,' yells Robbins. 'She's a hundred mile away from here. Take our line and git us to the dock. I want to git where I kin git a decent meal.'

"And so we slides into our wharf—a vessel with no trip below but a run of two hundred and twenty-five miles in eighteen and a half hours to her credit. Some goin' for an ill-found craft like the *Esther Sullivan*!"

The cook paused and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"What happened next?" inquired Jerry Davis.

"Well, as soon as we got her tied up, Jesse Publicover steps up.

"'Lookyhere, skipper,' says he, 'how did you know you could win that bet with this old hooker.

"Jesse was never very respectful in speakin' to the skipper, but Tom Robbins liked him the best of the crowd.

"'I knew I could trim him,' he says. 'I have a good vessel here, but I ain't got what he has got, and that's a big yellow streak a yard wide. I knew he'd quit in that breeze with that big nosed knockabout of his scoopin' water and playin' general ructions 'round his decks. I'll wager he's reefed down now and cal'latin' that I'm sunk, dismasted, or hove-to somewheres. I knew that feller sence he was a kid and I knew it was goin' to blow hard, and as I had a light vessel what needed a lot of new gear owin' to the dislike some of you have taken to what she had, I jest cal'lated I'd make Jason Churchill pay for it. And he will, for I cal'late I've jest about peeled him good. Yes, skinned him to the ballast! Now, I'm goin' ashore for somethin' to eat.'

"'Do we git new dories?' asks Jesse. 'New ones, not second handed things.'

"Yes,' growls Robbins. 'You'll git new dories—bran new ones. The vessel will be overhauled and fitted out with new sails and gear.'

"Jest as he was agoin' on to the dock, I had my say. 'How about my stove, skipper?' I says. 'Kin I order a new one?'

"He gives me a look that 'ud sour new milk. 'Yes,' says he in a roar ye could hear outside Ten Pound Island. 'For the love of Mike, git one. My stomach has bin clean ruined with your truck—'

"'A good one is what I want,' says I, an' them SHIPMATES are the best to be got.'

"'Then git one,' yells he, 'and by the Great Trawl Hook, ef ye ever dish me up any more of that damned goozy pig hash after this, there'll be one more cook in Hell when they take the tally!'"

Phinney rose from his seat on the locker and loosened his apron.

"So that's the story of the *Esther Sullivan's* race with the *Rose L. Pullen*, and what is more important, it is the yarn of how I got my SHIPMATE stove out of the stingiest skipper in Gloucester. Oh, boys, he was a hard, rough man was Tom Robbins, but he loved his grub. Holy Sailor! 'tis after eleven—sure I sh'd have turned in an hour ago!"

A few minutes later the long triangle of bunks were fully occupied, and the snores of the sleeping fishermen mingled with the crash and thunderous mutter of the seas outside, while the gallant schooner reared and stormed over the same old sea path that the *Esther Sullivan* ploughed in the years gone by.

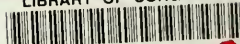






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